



A HISTORY OF BYBERRY AND SOMERTON

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**For Professor Morse
History of Pennsylvania
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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2. "Stewardship of a Century" - Independent Mutual Fire Insurance Company, Torresdale, Philadelphia.
3. Biography of Watson Comly as furnished by the Phila. Pedagogical Library from "The History of the Comly Family".
4. The word of "Old Timers" in the neighborhood.
5. A History of the Townships of Byberry and Morehead - Joseph C. Martindale, MD - revised by A. W. Dudley.

PREFACE

"How dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood,. . .
The orchard, the meadow, the deep-tangled wildwood,. . .
The underspreading pond, and the mill that stood by it,. . .
The cot of my father, the dairy-house nigh it,
And e'en the rude bucket that hung in the well".

From the song, "*The Old Oaken Bucket*"

While the scenes of Somerton and Byberry are not truly the scenes of my actual childhood, yet they are of my "childhood" days in the field of teaching. Be that as it may, great was the speculation among us new Comly teachers - teachers were frequently "new", for the long ride in the trolley and bus soon became too strenuous for the "city" teacher and she got her transfer at the first opportunity - great was the speculation as to who this Watson Comly was, what he looked like, and what he had done to have a school named for him.

Finally, just a few years ago, his biography was sent from the Philadelphia Pedagogical Library. From this, together with material from "Stewardship of a Century", there follows a short account of his life - Watson Comly was fifth in descent from Henry Comly who had married Agnes Heaton in 1695 and settled in Byberry township. Watson, son of Joseph and Rachel (Watson) Comly, was born in 1809 and died in 1876. He was principally a farmer but he was actively associated with every kind of public affairs in the northeast section of Philadelphia. He gave great attention to the public schools and was School Director for many years. He also represented his section as a state representative at Harrisburg for many years. Later he was closely associated with Joseph C. Martindale in compiling the "History of Byberry and Moreland", and much of the material of that book was furnished by him, but, through his innate modesty none of his own life was noted therein. At his death, the name "Watson Comly School" was bestowed upon a new school building erected in Byberry, now standing in active use at Kelvin and Byberry Roads, Somerton, Philadelphia.

The old Comly Homestead, known as "Old Sod", which Watson Comly inherited from his father, still stands, and fronts on what is now Roosevelt Boulevard.

At last we were acquainted! And as we began to get "bus" children from Byberry, our horizon broadened and news about old landmarks, old houses, the existence of old books, began to filter in.

Then Pennsylvania required the "History of Pennsylvania" as one of the required courses for state certification and a "paper" had to be written by those students doing graduate work.

And so, here was my opportunity to gather together some of the stories, chronicles, etc. of Byberry and Somerton, sister towns, whose past and present histories are so closely interwoven.

Interesting indeed, not to say intriguing was it to open our files at school and find such names as Watson, Comly, Vansant, Livezey, Knight, Townsend, Worthington, Tomlinson, etc., many of which appear over and over again in the history of Somerton and Byberry, for hundreds of the descendants of the original settlers by these names today live within twenty miles of Henry and Agnes Comly's original settlement near the Byberry Meeting House.

GENERAL HISTORY OF BYBERRY AND SOMERTON

The settlement of Pennsylvania is generally considered as having been commenced in 1681 by William Penn, but the Dutch and Swedes had made settlements on the western bank of the Delaware previous to that time, and had given to the country now embraced in the Delaware, Chester, Philadelphia and Bucks Counties, the name of Upland County. We know Penn soon changed this name to Chester and in the same year he divided it into three counties - Chester, Philadelphia, and Bucks.

At what time the first European first entered the Delaware is not known but in Rogerveen's map of New Netherlands printed in Amsterdam in 1676, the course of the Delaware with most of its tributaries among which is the Poquessing, is drawn with considerable accuracy. And it is with this section around the Poquessing Creek that we have to deal.

We find no account of any Swedish settlement having been made in the vicinity of Byberry, but it is quite probable that some such settlements were made, as we find in the list of "overseers for the highways nominated and elected by the Court, March 14th, 1682 the name of Erick Mullikay, as overseer of the district extending from Tawrony (Tacony) Creek to Poynessink (Poquessing) Creek". That there was a settlement in Byberry previous to the arrival of Penn there can be little doubt. We learn from a communication made by Benjamin Kite to Robert Van that the Walton family settled within the limits of Byberry in the year 1675, seven years before Penn's arrival in America. This family consisted of four single young men. They gave to the place the name of Byberry in honor of their native town near Bristol, England. Carrying their whole stock of utensils, provisions, etc. on their backs, after sometime spent in examining the country roundabout, they arrived at Poquessing Creek and were so highly pleased with the level .. lands in that vicinity, the abundance of good water, and the beautiful appearance of the country that they determined upon making a settlement near the bank of that stream. It seems that among the many sites that later attracted Penn's commissioners as the location for Philadelphia, this one in south Byberry at the mouth of the Poquessing also received consideration. But the lack of depth of water and a number of dangerous rocks at this part of the river known as "The Hen and Her Chickens" prevented Philadelphia from being located on the present site of Torresdale. Torresdale used to be pointed out to passengers aboard the river boats as "Old Philadelphia".

Having neither the time nor the means of erecting a dwelling, the brothers dug a cave in the earth and covered it with bark and dirt, and lived here while they prepared the land for crops. Not having any wheat to sow the land, two of the brothers walked to New Castle to procure a bushel of wheat for seed, and, shouldering a half bushel each, they carried it all the way home, a distance of nearly 50 miles. This was probably the first wheat ever raised in the township.

How many had settled in Byberry previous to 1682 is not known but in November 1677, the whole number of taxables north of the Schuylkill amounted to 65 and these were scattered

over the whole country between the Schuylkill and the Neshaminy Creek. Our accounts of these settlements are indeed meager, yet there can be no doubt that such settlements were made, and that they continued until Penn received his grant from Charles II.

Penn did not consider the grant of these lands from the King a sufficient title and so he proceeded to buy them from the Indians. We find this section mentioned in two Indian treaties - "do grant and dispose of our lands lying betwixt Pemmapecka and Nesheminck Creek, all along Nesheminck Creek, and backward of same and to run two days journey with a horse "up into ye country as ye said river doth go" - - - "and for consideration of so much Wampum, and so many Guns, shoes, stockings, Looking-glasses, Blankets and other goods as ye said William Penn shall be pleased to give unto us".

Among the settlers who came over in the ship "Welcome" in 1682 and who settled in Byberry were Giles Knight and John Carver and their families. About the same time John Hart and his family, Richard Collett and his wife, and Josiah Ellis arrived, all settling within the present limits of Byberry. Some time during the next year John Rush and his family settled here.

Most of these early settlers took up large tracts of land, which were laid off in the form of parallelograms from 100 to 500 acres each, extending in a northwesterly direction from the Poquessing across Byberry to near the road now the Byberry Turnpike. Nearly all the original surveys of land in Byberry were made by Thomas Holme, surveyor general.

These early settlers were subject to innumerable hardships in their attempts to settle the new country, some of them dwelling in caves or excavations in the earth, which the Indians taught them how to construct. These caves were dug in the ground to the depth of about three feet, the roofs were formed of timber, limbs of trees, etc., and were usually covered with sod or bark, and the chimneys were built of stone, mortared with clay. They were damp and gloomy abodes, yet served to protect their inmates from the weather. Giles Knight, it is said, lived about 6 weeks by the side of an old log without any shelter but the sky above him until the Indians afterwards taught him to construct a wigwam.

The Indians welcomed the early settlers of Byberry and were ever ready and willing to lend their white neighbors a helping hand when in distress. On one occasion, John Carver made a journey to Chester and left his family with provisions which he thought sufficient to last them during his absence, but, from some unforeseen circumstances, he was detained longer than was expected, and his wife and their two children were in great distress for want of food. Mrs. Carver applied to a party of neighboring Indians for assistance. They not only gave her provisions for her immediate needs, but, taking off the little boy's trousers, tied up the legs and filled them with corn, to be carried home for a future supply. At another time Giles Knight and Josiah Ellis went among them to procure beans and other vegetables. These were kindly furnished along with instructions for cultivating them.

At the time of the first settlement, the township of Byberry was a noted hunting ground of the Indians and in order to facilitate securing the game, they were in the habit of setting fire

to the rank grass that grew in all parts of the township and thus destroyed all timber. We find, as proof of this, that, at the time of the first settlement there were but few large trees, scarcely enough firewood for the settlers. The settlers, however, did not burn the grass off as the Indians had done, and in a few years, the whole surface, except where cultivated, was covered with a growth of fine timber. Two large trees are mentioned as having stood one on the lower end of the Watson Comly place and the other on the Knight estate and these served as way-marks for the people.

The friendly intercourse between the whites and their red neighbors was never so far broken as to cause one act of violence to be committed by either party, until after the peaceful principles of the early settlers were forgotten.

As the whites continued to increase, the Indians were gradually crowded out and moved onward toward the setting sun. But year after year, with the return of spring, little bands continued to arrive to spend the summer among their childhood haunts. But each year their numbers became fewer and fewer. It is said that the last Indians who lived in the township were two squaws, who were buried in the old graveyard at Byberry Meeting.

Nearly all the settlers of Byberry were Quakers, and their first act, like that of all other settlers, was to establish their homes. These, as we have said, were at first mere caves, but houses were soon built. The first houses were generally erected near springs or running streams to save the expense and trouble of digging wells. We find no account of the latter having been dug for several years after the first settlement, and when first introduced they occasioned much conversation among the settlers.

Their next step was to have a place where they could meet and worship God in spirit and in truth. Tradition says that Friends built a log meeting house on the flat lands belonging to John Hart (now owned by the widow of Colonel E. D. Morrell). It is said that a lot adjoining the meeting house was fenced off as a burying ground but every vestage of both has long since passed away. The distance proved too great for many friends living in the northern part of the township, and in order to accomodate them, another meeting was held once a month in a house then belonging to Henry English. So for a time two meetings were held in Byberry.

Difficulties and dissensions, which appear to have originated with George Keith of Philadelphia, had by 1691 involved not only the Friends in Byberry, but practically all Friends, in great trouble. Keith desired to make some radical changes in the discipline and the doctrines held by the Society, which they were not willing to adopt. He was warned of his conduct by the Friends, and finally withdrew from the Society. In Byberry the leading advocate of Keith and his doctrines was John Hart. He early embraced the views held by Keith, and from his influence and connections, drew the Rushes, Colletts and the most of those living in South Byberry to his support. The Keithian meeting appears to have been unsuccessful and after two or three years it was broken up, the adherents joining other religious persuasions. Some became Episcopalians and assisted in founding a church called "All Saints" in lower Dublin, while others, becoming Baptists, but retaining the garb of the Quakers, were called

Quaker Baptists. Some of these again changed to Seven-day Baptists, and were the originators of that sect.

About this time we find the name of Thomas Groome, a resident of Somerton, registered as one of the members of the meeting.

We have met with no accounts of any schools previous to 1710. The children of the first settlers were brought up with a very limited chance of obtaining an education, and many were unable to read or even to write their own names. Byberry had but one school, which was at the Meeting House and under the control of Friends. This was kept up most of the time from 1711, but only the three R's were taught. However, it was one of the best schools in the country at that time.

But around 1720 when such things as fortune telling, astrology, and superstition were in great repute, the Friends were awakened to a just sense of the value and importance of properly educating their youth, and the Meeting was soon impressed with the necessity of erecting a suitable building for school purposes. Accordingly, in this year we find a school house erected near the meeting house. It was a log building about 18 ft. square.

Some time previous to this a few houses were built near each other just west of Byberry and as the place began to assume the appearance of a village, it was called Smithfield, the name of which has since been discarded for that of Somerton, in honor of Judge Somers who lived nearby. About this time it contained ten buildings, among which were a store, a tavern, and a blacksmith shop. This is the first account we have found of this village and the time of its foundation cannot now with any certainty be known.

About 1721 African slavery was introduced into Byberry by the wealthier settlers, as help for the rougher parts of the work indoors and out. They were for the most part brought directly from Africa to Philadelphia, but some were brought from New York. In 1727 in an inventory of the property of a deceased Friend, the following items occur - "one negro girl £20, one negro boy £30," and again in 1743 are these "a negro woman, Phillis £20, and one negro boy, Wallis, £40." These give us an idea of the value of slaves at that time.

Among those in and near Byberry who owned slaves, we may name the following - Growden, Swift, Carver, Comly, Duffield, Rush, Knight, and Walton. Slavery never became popular in Byberry and was probably at its height in 1758, when the Yearly Meeting issued its testimony against keeping slaves. After this Friends were careful not to go deeper into the evil, but they did not manumit those already held until the meeting became more positive in its directions, when most of those belonging to the Society set their slaves free. Others soon became convinced of the evil, so that in a few years but few slaves were found in the townships. Of the negro race living in Byberry, not a single descendant remains. The last was Cuffy Todd, who was murdered by a deserter from one of the vessels at Philadelphia.

During the French and Indian War (1755-'63) the people of Byberry had their share of troubles. As the government was in want of soldiers, several persons from Byberry entered the service, among whom were some belonging to the Friends. These latter were disowned by the Society for so doing. The people were kept in great apprehension for fear the Indians would come down from the mountains and destroy them, and some idle persons raised the report that they had come and destroyed the village of Smithfield. This news caused great consternation, and many fled in haste to Dunk's Ferry, where they crossed into New Jersey. The report afterward proving false, the fugitives returned not a little discomfited that they should have been so easily frightened.

There is no account of these two townships having been deluged with blood during the Revolution, nor of any battle having occurred except the skirmish at Smithfield (Somerton). Of that, it is said that about 25 Americans were in the vicinity of Bustleton, when they were pursued by a company of 75 British soldiers. As the pursuit did not continue farther than Bustleton, the Americans thought the danger had passed, and accordingly halted at Vanhorn's Hotel in Smithfield, to spend the night. This company was under the command of Jacob Humphreys and on that very night allowed themselves to be surprised by 100 British infantry and 20 cavalry, and in the engagement which followed, one half of them were slain or captured. One person, named Glentworth, while trying to escape, fell over the fence just as a soldier discharged his musket at him. As he was supposed to be killed, the enemy retired, and he escaped unharmed. On that occasion several bullets were shot through the front door of a house in the village, which belonged to a person named Vansant. He himself escaped only by hiding under a hogshead. In the morning, several of the British went to Esquire Comly's house, where they demanded breakfast, which he at length furnished much against his will. The same night the British visited the home of Jacob Saurman, and a man there named Boucher, who had no time to escape from the house, crept into the chimney and his wife pushed the bed against it so as to conceal the fireplace. Although they searched the house, they could not find the man, so the British left, taking the best of the horses with them.

Many of the people were Friends and were restrained by religious principles from joining in the contest. They suffered loss of much property - horses, sheep, hogs, wheat, corn, etc. were carried off. Men were seized and put in the army. Horses were taken from the plows, household goods were seized. On March 6, 1778 a company of Lacey's men set fire to several barns and wheat stacks under pretense of orders from Washington to prevent them falling into the hands of the British who were then in possession of Philadelphia. There was little security for either persons or property - wheat was taken from the granary, corn from the crib, fatted pigs from the pen, and even pork from the tubs.

Washington had prohibited any intercourse with the British at Philadelphia, yet as provisions were high, and the British paid gold or silver for all they bought, many ran the risk of being captured and when a successful trip was made, they seemed to be well repaid for the danger.

Jonathan Walton is said to have taken an active part against the Americans and was forced to go to Canada, but afterwards returned and was not molested. In 1850, an unofficial

inscription on one of the rafters of the Byberry Meeting in which Jonathan Walton was spoken of as a "D----- Tory", could still be seen.

Some other people of the township were in favor of the old government but few were forced to leave the neighborhood on that account.

During the war, as is well known, Congress issued "Bills of Credit" to a large amount. These were called "Continental" money and it soon began to depreciate. One man in Byberry, it is said, paid \$250 of it for a tea-kettle and another paid \$100 for a mug of beer.

On January 20, 1778, General Lacey stationed eighty men at Smithfield to keep close watch on the enemy. Here on February 14th, they were surprised and about one - half were slain or taken prisoners by Capt. Thomas and the Bucks County Tories. Thomas took the Bustleton Road and fought the skirmish at Smithfield.

An old account says that Washington, while on the march to attack Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781, encamped one night with the main part of the army on both sides of the Poquessing Creek in the southern part of Byberry, near the Red Lion Hotel. (still standing on Bristol Pike).

Although armies were as necessary in the War of 1812 as now, yet few people in either township enlisted in their country's cause, preferring to remain at their more agreeable occupations at home. Since people in other sections were equally unpatriotic, the government found it necessary to make a requisition upon the States for troops. Several in this section were drafted, and ordered to report at headquarters below Philadelphia. Most of these refused to go and were afterwards court-martialed, and fined sums varying from twenty to one hundred dollars each. Friends' discipline not only disapproved of wars, but of all with them, and members who had been drafted could neither go nor pay fines imposed upon them in lieu of service. Many, therefore, lost their property which was taken and sold to meet the fines. Friends of others paid the fines and the property was restored.

During the depression that followed the inflationary period that swept the country during the war, many people in the prime of life lost every cent they had. But few persons in the townships became so reduced as this, yet all felt the change of times, and were to a greater or less extent sufferers. But by habits of economy, in a few years things were again moving along smoothly and prosperously for them.

The subsequent history of the townships, especially that of Byberry follows closely upon the history of the Friends and their Meeting House. The old meeting-house, which was built in 1714, and reconstructed in 1753, began to have a very dilapidated appearance before the close of the eighteenth century, and by the year 1808 was in such a tottering condition that it was no longer tenable, and the Friends in that year erected a new house near the locality of the old one. From a census taken in 1810, the members of the meeting numbered four hundred and forty-six.

The year 1810 might be considered an important one in the history of the Meeting, for it was then that John Comly came forward in the public ministry. He was afterwards one of the most noted preachers of the Society and the Meeting seems to have been more prosperous than at any other period.

There had been a difference of opinion upon some important doctrinal points for some time after this, and in 1827 a final separation was the result. The Orthodox portion of the Byberry Friends continued to hold meetings for several years, but some of them dying and others moving from the township, meetings ceased to be held by 1859.

At the time of the separation the members of the Byberry Meeting numbered 504, and only 39 of them withdrew. The meeting is still held, but to a casual observer seems to be on the decline. Nearly all the more numerous families in and around Byberry worshipped here, and the descendents of the Comlys, the Carvers, the Knights, the Gilberts, the Waltons, the Townsends, the Walmsleys, the Worthingtons, and the Tomlinsons names found away back in the primitive settlement of the place - still compose the principal part of the congregation.

Although the great majority of the people of Byberry are Friends or friendly inclined, but several other societies have settled there in these later years. In the village of Somerton and its vicinity many of the Methodist persuasion have settled and feeling the want of a convenient place for religious worship they started a meeting in the old school house in 1834. Although the movement was looked upon with disapproval by the Friends, yet the church continued to grow and in 1848 a substantial stone church was erected. At first it was united with one in Bustleton and one minister had charge of both. The circuit was divided in 1858 and since that time Somerton has supported a minister alone and the church has been enlarged to quite an extent. During the past century three churches have arisen in these townships, - the above mentioned Somerton Methodist Church, St. Andrews in the Field, an Episcopalian church originating in Somerton in 1897, and the Byberry Baptist Chapel begun in 1870. Of late years masses for the Catholics are held in a private house on Byberry Road in Somerton.

SCHOOLS

It would scarcely be a history of these sections if the schools were not given some attention in the accounts. We have already mentioned the log school house which was erected near the Byberry Meeting House in 1720 and in this a school was kept until 1722, when no longer fit for the purpose, it was pulled down. The school was then moved to the meeting house and continued there until after the Revolution. Although regularly kept since 1750, affairs were loosely conducted. James Thornton, Thomas Townsend, John Townsend, and Jonathan Knight were appointed to have schools under their particular care. The Meeting instructed the committee to employ "such teachers as were not only in membership of the Friends, but who were well qualified for the business, and careful and attentive in the discharge of their duties and especially that they be of sound moral and religious principles,

that by precept and example they might inculcate useful sentiments in the minds of those under their tuition”.

In 1776 they employed Benjamin Kite who was an excellent teacher and is said to have brought about great change for the better in the manner of instructing the youth of Byberry. He was a man of good judgment, and although of moderate abilities, he had peculiar faculty for imparting his knowledge, and kept the best school that had then ever been in the township.

The Byberry School was the most ancient as well as the most interesting institution of learning in the two townships. It had many difficulties which impeded its career of usefulness, but owing to the liberal opinions of the Friends, its progress has always been onward. The oldhouse built in 1792 remained standing until 1823 when a new building was erected in its place. It was two stories high and built of stone. It was disbanded in 1847. In the lower room a single row of desks was formally placed around next to the walls, so that the pupils sat facing the stones and mostly had their backs to the teacher. The benches consisted of a number of stools, without backs, fastened to a plank ten or twelve feet long, and so arranged as to suit the desks. On these, pupils sat from morning till night, leaning over their desks in front, but without any support whatever for their backs. The desks had lids, which could be lifted up. Boys and girls could often be seen with the lids resting on their heads while they were studying. In the center of the room, previous to 1840, stood the old wood stove, in which many a cord of oak and hickory had been consumed. It was then the duty of the larger boys to split enough wood to keep the room warm and when an arm-load was wanted one of them was detached for that duty. At noon time the boys and girls took turns in sweeping out the school room, but neither of these tasks was considered a hardship. Quill pens, and writing copies were used. There was very little furniture - and for many years not even a blackboard was had. Very little explanation of any kind was given by the teacher.

All schools in the township were under the control of the Preparative Meeting until about 1847 when the Court of Quarter Sessions appointed directors for the schools. Soon after this, the directors were chosen by the people.

But this Friends' school at Byberry, while perhaps the most important, was not the only attempt at providing schooling for the children. Several attempts were made during the years, but of these we need mention only a few.

In 1795 it was decided to start a girls' school and Hannah Thornton opened one at her house which continued for only a few months. Two years later it was revived and Sarah Samms was employed as teacher but it, too, soon closed. The idea of a girls' school, however, was not given up, and in 1804 John Comly opened a boarding school for girls at his own house and took in day scholars. At first it was successful, but, for some reason, in 1810, it was changed into a boys' school. There were several attempts in Byberry at starting boarding schools but they met with very little success and sooner or later were discontinued.

In 1811, a few friends associated for the purpose of establishing a school for girls. It was successful for quite some time but was discontinued in 1848.

In 1826, Henry Pike opened a boarding school on Byberry and Bensalem Pikes, mainly for small boys and it continued until 1844.

Several small schools, taught by females, were opened in different parts of the townships from time to time but were usually of short duration.

In 1836, a school where the higher branches should be taught was established. David Griscom was the teacher and through his wise administration, it rapidly rose in public estimation. Later, because of a change in administration, the school was a failure.

For many years a school was kept at Pleasantville (about one mile east of Somerton) and Charles Dyer was its last teacher. His salary in 1846 was only \$200 per year. This school was discontinued in 1847 and the pupils have since attended the school in Somerton.

It is stated that in 1797 a school house was built near the village of Somerton and school was regularly kept there since that time. It was built of stone, but was torn down in 1847. In that year the Controllers of Public Schools concluded, for the better accomodation of the children of Byberry, to build three new school houses - one at Somerton, one at Lazy Lane (called the Godfrey School and built on land purchased from Watson Comly), and one at Cresson Corners, named the Benjamin Rush School.

The one at Somerton, called the Patrick Henry School, was a one-story affair, accomodating about seventy pupils. The erection of this school house was violently opposed by many of the inhabitants who refused to avail themselves of the opportunity to school their children at the public's expense. The schools and all connected with them were denounced in the most bitter terms, and the children who attended them were styled "pauper" children. So odious were these public schools to some that they forbade their children even to walk across the school grounds but "self-interest" soon induced them to patronize the new schools which have since become their pride rather than their disgrace.

(Previous to 1834, two kinds of schools existed, known as pauper and pay schools. The Act of 1834 as amended in 1835 and 1836, established the present school system. Its passage excited the greatest opposition throughout the state.)

A two story stone building was erected in Somerton in 1894, and named the Watson Comly School, in honor of the man who had been so interested in education in that section. In 1929, this school was replaced by the present, much larger, more modern brick building on Byberry Road. However, it still retains its former name, Watson Comly School. For many years, the Byberry children had been transported by school bus to the Jacobs School in Bustleton, the Byberry School having been closed. When the larger school was built in Somerton some of these children could be accomodated there, and so they receive free bus transportation to that school. This has united these two sections closer than ever, and perhaps in some near future date, they may actually become one.

INDUSTRIES

Farming naturally was, and still is, the chief industry since Byberry and Somerton are agricultural districts. Farming at first was carried on in a crude manner; the farming implements were but poorly suited to their use, and much of the fertility of the soil had been exhausted by continued farming, no pains being taken to make or apply manure so as to produce better crops. An agricultural society was started in 1789 and several of the Byberry farmers became members. It is still in existence today as the Philadelphia Agricultural Society and many valuable changes took place in farming due to the experiments made by members of the society. About the year 1820, a mowing machine was introduced into Byberry by Samuel Newbold. Threshing machines were introduced in 1830, by Edward Duffield.

Some time during 1712, Giles Knight erected a bolting mill on the small stream that ran through his meadow. No flour was made at this mill, but the people took their grain to Pennepack or Poquessing mills, and when it was ground, hauled it to Giles Knight's to have it bolted. This meadow is part of the property now owned by the family of Edward Shallcross. Thomas Shallcross, a prominent member of the Shallcross family, was the son of Rachel Comly, daughter of Watson Comly. His homestead still stands on what today is Roosevelt Boulevard. It was for him that the school in Byberry for truant boys was named.

We find no account of any tavern in either township previous to 1746. One is mentioned as having been kept in the village of Smithfield, but no further account of it has been preserved. About this time an application for a tavern at Byberry Crossroads was made by Richard Carver. But several inhabitants signed a remonstrance against the application. It must have been effectual for we find no account of a tavern afterwards until 1755 when we find mention of a tavern called "Three Tuns" kept here in 1760. The Red Lion Hotel just east of Byberry is the oldest in this section. It still stands on Bristol Pike just north of Poquessing Creek. It is said that on the 29th of August in 1774, the delegates from Massachusetts to Congress dined here. John Adams is also supposed to have stopped here and Washington encamped in the neighborhood while on his way to Yorktown.

About 1755, there were two successful brickyards in successful operation in Byberry.

For some years previous to this, a grain factory had been in operation on Byberry Creek. The business was carried on by the Rushes but seems to have gone down soon after this time.

In 1759 Benjamin Gilbert erected a grist mill on Byberry Creek near the center of Byberry, which proved a great accomodation to the inhabitants. Sometime after this Jonathan Knight built another grist mill on the Poquessing.

In 1776, a saw mill was owned by Daniel Walton. When this mill was built is not known but it was permitted to go into decay on Daniel's death.

About 1791, broom corn began to be raised in the townships and brooms to be manufactured for market. Benjamin Atkinson was the first who made it a regular business. He found it a profitable business, and about 1805, he admitted Bezaleel Croasdale as a partner, and they monopolized the trade until 1816. The brooms were sold in Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Lancaster, and Trenton. From 1830 to 1840 an average of sixty thousand brooms were annually manufactured in Byberry alone, for the Philadelphia market. Broom corn is scarcely grown at all in Byberry now. At one time, it was the custom for nearly every farmer to grow broom corn, make brooms, and sell them in Philadelphia along with his regular produce.

Prior to 1780 but few stores had been kept in Byberry, and storekeeping was very profitable. Giles Knight was the first who engaged in the business, but when James Thornton came over from England, he brought some books for sale, and soon after conceived the idea of starting a store here. It proved very profitable and he and his family continued in the business for the next forty years.

DISTINGUISHED CITIZENS

Although Byberry and Somerton have been a limited area, yet they have become somewhat renowned for having been the birth place and residence of some of our most distinguished men. Watson Comly and Thomas Shallcross we have already mentioned. William Cooper, afterwards a member of Congress, and father of the distinguished novelist, James Fenimore Cooper, Dr. Enoch Edwards, an officer in the army of the Revolution, and Dr. Walmsley, a prominent medical and scientific man - have all lived within the limits of the townships. The gallant Decatur, and his father, Captain Decatur, with his family were residents for several years previous to 1798, when President Adams called them into the service of our country. Byberry can also boast of having given birth to Dr. Benjamin Rush and his brother Hon. Judge Rush, both of whom were well known.

INTERESTING FACTS AND EVENTS

Now that we have described the settling of these two townships, the founding of their churches and schools, and the establishing of their industries, what could be more fitting than to close our history by relating some of the interesting events of the neighborhood.

In 1733, the Byberry Meeting secured a "Book of Discipline" for 15 shillings. About the same time a number of other works were added and formed a kind of circulating library for the use of Friends. This appears to be the first library ever established within the limits of either township and was highly valued at the time.

Thomas Chalkley of Frankford, a prominent preacher among Friends, mentions an earthquake having occurred in Byberry in 1737. It was not very severe but the shock was sensibly felt. In 1763 another mild one occurred. On the 29th of November, 1783 a much more severe one was felt, followed by another in five hours.

This winter (1740) was remarkable for a great snowstorm, which covered the fences. The crust on it was so hard that horses and sleds could travel over it in any direction without following the roads. Those who felled trees at that time were much surprised when the snow melted to find the stumps from six to eight feet high.

(1749) The first account of the appearance of the seventeen-year locusts in Byberry was in this year. They came in great numbers and did much damage by injuring trees when about to deposit their eggs.

In about 1758, Thomas Livezey made a survey and draft of Somerton. He represented the town lot as containing 80 acres with the main street running diagonally across it. Among the owners of the lot at that time we find the names of Comly, Knight, and Walmesley.

Belief in witchcraft, during the early days of Byberry, was exceedingly common. It extended not only to the poorer and more ignorant classes but to the more influential and intelligent. Belief in the absurdity existed as late as 1825. At one time a young man of Byberry was taken ill with severe pains in the breast. He went to a conjurer in Bensalem who said the young man had six wedges secreted beneath the ribs. The conjurer, on the young man's second visit, said he had removed two of the wedges and that, with careful treatment, he could remove the other four. Fortunately the young man saw through the ruse and discontinued the visits. At another time General Willits who was constructing a bridge over the Neshaminy Creek on the Byberry and Bensalem Turnpikes, had a shovel stolen. He told his men that a conjurer had told him a black man had stolen the shovel and that if he didn't return it, the shovel would become red hot within his stomach. The shovel was back in place the next morning.

1774 was remarkable for the snow storm which occurred on the 3rd of May and which did much damage to crops in Byberry and the adjoining districts. In the same notes we find that in February of 1779, the weather was so warm that the bees swarmed and the peach trees blossomed.

In 1780 the Hessian fly - that scourge of the wheat crop - first made its appearance in the vicinity.

In 1793, and again in 1798, yellow fever made ravages in Philadelphia. In All Saints' Church yard are buried in one grave, two friends who are supposed to have died of the disease in 1798. John Carver mentions the story of a Byberry man who visited Philadelphia during the epidemic and became intoxicated. While lying in the street, he was picked up for dead by a passing funeral cart and thrown into the pit on the outskirts of the city. On becoming sober again, he scrambled out from the heap of dead bodies and returned to

Byberry. Strange to say he never contracted the disease, but no doubt left the bottle to others after that.

In 1812, a violent hurricane passed across the townships and did much damage. The roof of the academy at Bustleton was blown off; Jacob Wilson's barn, in Byberry, was blown to pieces; Joseph Knight's wagon-house unroofed; fences were blown down, trees uprooted or snapped off a few feet from the ground, and orchards nearly destroyed. In 1820 and 1821 similar storms visited the townships and did equally as much damage. On the 2nd of April, 1841, a very violent storm occurred about sunset. It unroofed barns, moved two long rows of sheds at the meeting-house, and blew over several trees in different parts of the townships. On the 12th of the same month snow fell all day and night, as was on an average about twelve inches deep. Since 1841, the townships have been visited by several hurricanes which have done much damage.

But in speaking of "great snows" there have been at least two in my memory which have tied up practically all Somerton traffic, except the train, for several days. One was during the early '30's when the snow drifted so badly in places that it was impossible for traffic to get through either Bustleton Pike, Byberry Road or Southampton Road, the three main entrances into Somerton. This seemed unbelievable to people in Bustleton and Philadelphia where the snow had not drifted. Again in 1940, on Valentine's Day, the snow began in the morning and by 3 o'clock in the afternoon was so deep that the Boulevard was lined up with trucks and cars stuck in the drifts and blocking the highway in every direction. The passengers from the cars and buses had to seek shelter in the one farmhouse nearby on the Boulevard (the old Watson Comly Homestead) and in a little one-room road stand on the corner. About seventy people were huddled in this tiny shop and had to stand all night, but were glad for the warm shelter. Somerton was "snowed in" for a week that time, for it was impossible for buses to make their way through the mountainous drifts.

One of the seventy in this tiny road stand was one of the "new" "city" teachers from Comly. Is it any wonder she soon got her transfer? And so, again, there was a "new" teacher at the Watson Comly School!

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